

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
11 October 1966

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State Department review
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NSA review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

Communist control of the population in Binh Dinh Province has been seriously affected by the military reverses inflicted on VC/PAVN forces in Operation IRVING. The province has long been a center of Communist military activity and a principal source of rice for Viet Cong forces. The unusual number of refugees now coming under GVN control suggests that the peasantry will give its allegiance to whichever authority is in possession of the province.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Only light and widely scattered contact was reported today between allied and Communist forces throughout the country (Para. 1). Viet Cong guerrillas hit seven South Vietnamese outposts in the flooded Mekong River delta area south of Saigon (Para. 2). Intercepted enemy communications indicate that elements of the 5th Viet Cong Division may be preparing for an offensive operation in western Phuoc Tuy Province (Paras. 3-4). The effect of allied operations in Binh Dinh Province (Paras. 5-11).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
On 11 October, Premier Ky appointed a southern Catholic to the position of health secretary (Para. 1).

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III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. Communist Political Developments:

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[redacted] Hanoi propaganda reveals that some VC are tiring of war (Para. 5). Chinese People's Daily lashes out at recent spate of peace proposals (Paras. 6-8).

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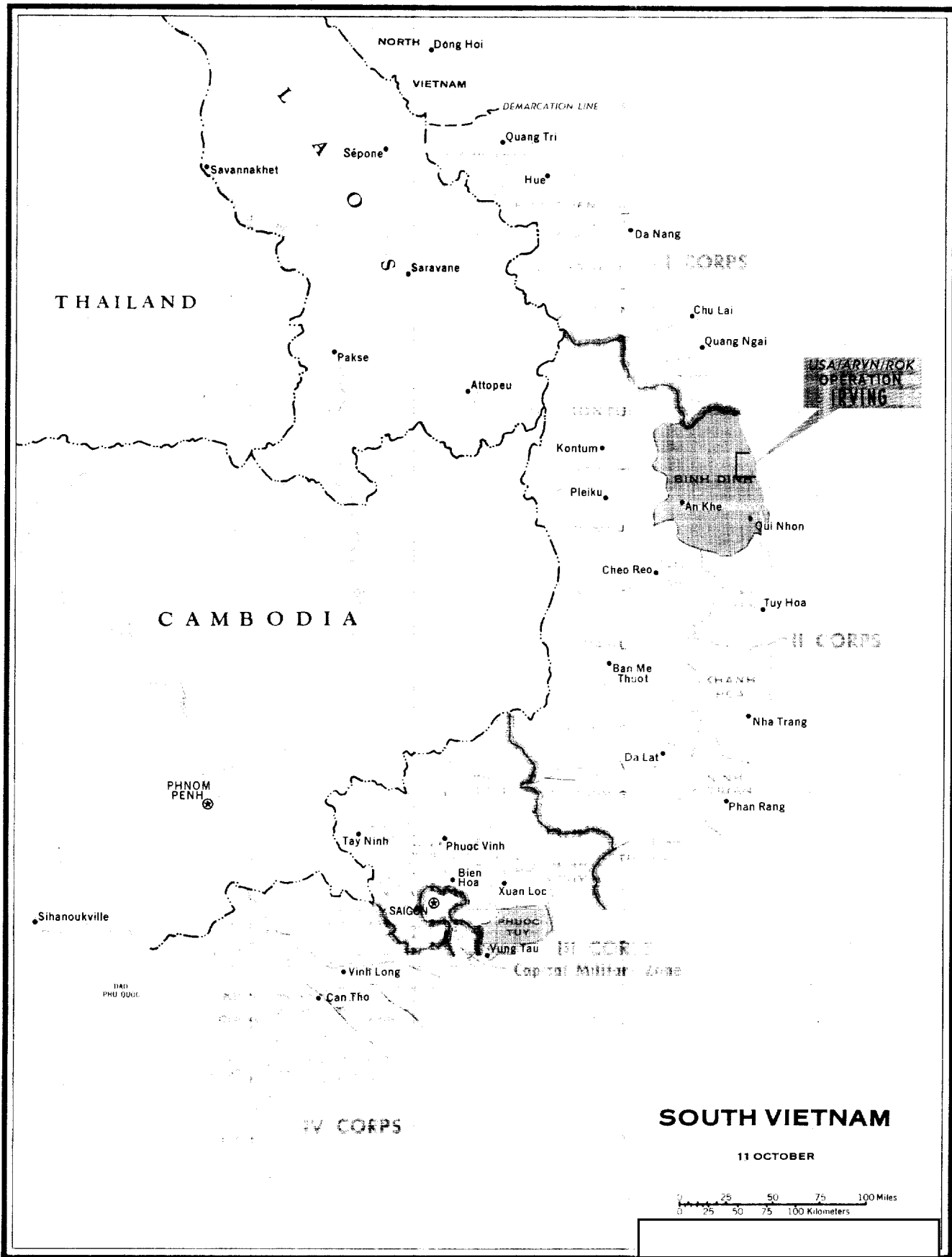
VI. Other Major Aspects:

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[redacted] North Vietnamese delegation to Poland seeks rolling mills for still unfinished Thai Nguyen steel plant (Paras. 2-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Only light and widely scattered contact was reported on 11 October for the 30 allied ground operations of battalion size or larger currently in progress throughout South Vietnam.

2. Communist guerrillas hit a number of isolated South Vietnamese posts in the flooded Mekong River delta early on 11 October. The Viet Cong launched seven attacks, the largest being an assault against a fort manned by a platoon of local militia about 20 miles south of Saigon. There were simultaneous predawn mortar and grenade attacks on four other outposts in the delta area south of Saigon. In two other attacks in the country's southern tip, allied aircraft were called in to support friendly outposts. Over-all casualties on both sides were reported to be light.

The Viet Cong 5th Division Planning Offensive Operations

3. There are continuing indications that elements of the Viet Cong 5th Division may be preparing for offensive operations in coastal Phuoc Tuy Province. Recently intercepted Communist communications have revealed the movement of the headquarters of the 274th Regiment and other units associated with this division. Numerous other messages of a tactical nature have reported on the deployments of troops, locations of enemy troops, and areas of future activities.

4. The exact area and specific target of the impending operation are not known at this time; however, this operation will probably be launched in the western portion of Phuoc Tuy Province.

The Impact of IRVING on Central Binh Dinh

5. Joint military Operation IRVING being conducted by US, South Vietnamese, and South Korean.

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units in central Binh Dinh Province, about 25 miles northwest of Qui Nhon, has not only inflicted serious losses on Communist forces in the area but has apparently also seriously shaken the control and influence of the Communists over the local population. Recent press reports tell of as many as 16,000 refugees having fled the area of the fighting, probably Phu My District, where most of the US forces are engaged at present. Each of the districts involved in the military activity have populations of over 100,000.

6. The actual operational area of IRVING includes part of the coastal lowland area of southern Phu My and northern Phu Cat districts. The most prominent landscape feature in the area is Hung Lac Peninsula, which juts into the South China Sea. It is here that some of the heavy fighting between US and Communist forces has occurred, much of it in caves in the hills that fringe the western shore of the peninsula.

7. Binh Dinh Province has long been a center of Communist military strength. About 44 percent of the province is still considered to be in the firm control of the Communists--much of it in the rice bowl areas of the coastal lowlands. The main enemy strength in the province is the North Vietnam Army (NVA) 610th Division, a composite organization consisting of the 12th and 22nd NVA regiments and the Viet Cong 2nd Regiment. Additionally, five separate NVA battalions are located in the province, as well as at least two Viet Cong battalions. Irregular forces, according to a captured enemy document, numbered just over 50,000 as of the early spring of 1966. Enemy forces currently engaged by the US forces are believed to be the 4th and 5th battalions of the 12th NVA Regiment, as well as organic supporting units, and some fire support elements from the Viet Cong 2nd Regiment.

8. Although US forces have taken 437 prisoners to date, only 11 NVA members have so far been identified. The small number of NVA prisoners suggests that forces engaged by the US 1st Air Cavalry Division

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may either be largely Viet Cong main force units or possibly irregulars fighting a stiff rear guard effort to cover the withdrawal of main force units. Further evidence of the possibility that many Communist irregulars may be involved in the action is suggested by the small number of weapons captured--67 (five crew served)--versus the number of individuals killed or captured, 433 and 437, respectively.

9. The current heavy fighting taking place in Phu My and Phu Cat districts is in an area of heavy rice production--the control of which is probably critical for the Communists if their operations in other areas of the province are to be fully supported. Rice from this area is probably also moved outside the province to Communist units in rice-deficient areas.

10. According to a captured document--a political activity report for Phu Cat District--the majority of the population in Phu Cat was participating in the guerrilla movement. In this area, the majority of the population would be farmers. The same document admits, however, that although the guerrilla movement is widespread, there is very little depth to it--primarily due to a lack of political motivation and ideological indoctrination.

11. The conditions described for Phu Cat might apply equally to the adjoining district of Phu My where the main part of the US combat effort appears to be taking place. The large influx of refugees suggests very strongly that what the Viet Cong document describes as a lack of depth of support is true. Now that the armed Viet Cong are being driven out, the occupants of the combat villages are unwilling to remain in place. What is happening in this area follows an almost classic pattern in the war with the peasantry going over to the side which appears at the time to be able to provide the most security.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Dr. Tran Van Lu-Y has been appointed the secretary of state for health to replace former secretary Kha, a northerner, who resigned as a result of the recent controversy involving regional loyalties and alleged "police state" interference by police director Loan. Lu-Y is a southern Catholic and a "close friend" of Prime Minister Ky, according to preliminary biographic information from the US Embassy. He was previously assigned to a government clinic in Gia Dinh Province. The appointment of a southerner is probably a concession to the six southern ministers who submitted their resignations to Ky on 6 October. Ky may hope that they will reconsider their resignations, which he has not yet accepted.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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Hanoi Urges Southerners Not to be Deceived by US
Peace Talk

5. Hanoi radio is continuing its commentary on "US peace frauds." A broadcast of 8 October appeared to reflect genuine concern that the Viet Cong may be tiring of the struggle. The broadcast said "many people are worried" about the increasingly atrocious war and "think we should be more

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yielding and flexible" in an effort to avoid bloodshed. These people believe that "the use of diplomatic skill may sometimes spare sacrifices." In a rather defensive tone, the broadcast assured its listeners that "we do know how to be flexible" and "how to negotiate," but that the present enemy precluded this approach. It concluded with a patriotic appeal to make additional sacrifices to preserve what it termed "South Vietnamese" independence and freedom.

Chinese Communists Reject UN Peace Initiatives

6. Peking on 10 October lashed out at all recent Vietnam peace proposals, particularly those connected with the current UN session. A People's Daily editorial charged that US-Soviet collusion was the moving force behind recent peace proposals. The article repeated the familiar Chinese assertion that the UN could have no role in a Vietnam settlement and charged that the proposal by U Thant was an "American coercion."

7. The lengthy editorial further stressed the necessity for the "immediate and complete" withdrawal of all US troops prior to negotiations and declared that there should be no "brooking of compromise" on this point. This is the standard Chinese position and is consistent with a series of earlier, briefer denunciations of individual peace proposals on Vietnam.

8. Peking's over-all propaganda coverage of Vietnam developments remains low, reflecting continuing preoccupation with internal developments. Coverage of the Vietnam war in propaganda broadcasts dropped to two percent of the total during the 3-9 October period, a new low for 1966, and less than five percent of all broadcasting during the past month.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

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Hanoi Seeks Polish Steel Mills

2. North Vietnam has sent a group of engineers to Warsaw to discuss the possible purchase of two rolling mills for the still unfinished steel plant at Thai Nguyen. The plant was originally provided to the DRV as part of a Chinese aid project. The trip indicates that North Vietnam is still interested in completing the project which is several years behind schedule. Those portions of the plant which are operational have been fabricating imported finished steel into products which can be used to repair structures damaged by US air operations.

3. Any agreements concluded in Warsaw will probably be long term in nature. The Thai Nguyen complex, which has at least two blast furnaces operating, lacks the open-hearth furnaces necessary to convert blast-furnace pig iron into raw steel. Without an open-hearth furnace, the Thai Nguyen steel complex will be incomplete even if the North Vietnamese should succeed in their quest for Polish rolling mills.

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